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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001358

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [WI](#)

SUBJECT: JULY 3 DISCUSSION OF MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN RELATIONS  
AND WESTERN SAHARA WITH BELKHEIR

REF: A. STATE 122658

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 1250 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman; reasons 1.4 (B)(D)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) In an extended exchange July 3 with Presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir, Ambassador reviewed reftel talking points, expressing strong U.S. disappointment over recent setbacks in Moroccan-Algerian relations, noting that provocative actions from both sides had contributed to the current serious impasse, and underscoring the need for restraint and renewed efforts at rapprochement. Belkheir reviewed the litany of Algerian grievances against Morocco; repeated previous arguments that by rejecting the Baker Plan, Morocco had missed a chance to resolve the Western Sahara issue in a way that would meet its concerns; and initially insisted that Algerian references to the Sahrawi right to independence, not just self-determination, was a longstanding Algerian position. He contrasted this behavior to Algeria's unswerving and principled support over the last three decades for a UN-based solution to the Western Sahara issue that honored the principle of self-determination.

[1](#)2. (C) Belkheir also argued that if the United States really wanted to help, it should press Morocco to accept the Baker Plan, just as Algeria had pressed the Polisario to accept it. Belkheir later in the day briefed the Ambassador on President Bouteflika's reaction to our demarche. In the clearest explanation to date as to why Algerian rhetoric may have hardened in recent weeks, Bouteflika said that in the context of current unacceptable Moroccan behavior, as long as Morocco was rejecting "international legality" by reversing its position on the holding of a referendum and by refusing to accept Baker, Algeria reserved the right, in reaction, to speak about Sahrawi rights to both self-determination and independence. Should Morocco accept "international legality," Algeria would respond accordingly. In the meantime, however, it would not accept a "fait accompli" on the Western Sahara. Septel will offer an analysis and recommendations, from an Algiers perspective, on how we might manage -- and reverse -- the current setback in Algerian-Moroccan rapprochement. (End Summary)

U.S. DISAPPOINTED OVER SETBACK TO  
ALGERIAN-MOROCCAN RAPPROCHEMENT EFFORTS

[1](#)3. (C) During July 3 morning meeting with Presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir, Ambassador expressed strong U.S. disappointment over recent setbacks in Moroccan-Algerian relations, triggered in part by provocative Algerian statements, and underscored the need for both sides to act with restraint and renew efforts at rapprochement. Reviewing each of the talking points and noting that we understood Algerian frustrations, Ambassador argued it that both sides had contributed to the current impasse and that it was in both sides' interest to get things back on track. Algeria and Morocco were neighbors and would always be so, and it served neither their interests nor the interests of the region to allow the current state of affairs to continue. Sooner or later, both sides would have to take up the work of resuming rapprochement, as they have periodically done in the past, so they might as well resume their efforts sooner rather than later. Ambassador emphasized we were counting on the vision and statesmanship of President Bouteflika to choose a course of action that reflected Algeria's interests in regional cooperation and improved relations with Morocco.

BELKHEIR: ALGERIA CAN'T ENGAGE WHEN MOROCCO  
IS CONTINUING SUCH UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

[1](#)4. (C) Covering familiar territory, Belkheir reviewed the litany of Algerian complaints against Morocco, among other things, its rejection of the Baker Plan, its rejection of a referendum Morocco had previously agreed to, the extremely insulting manner in which the Moroccans had treated the Algerian prime minister by abruptly canceling his visit, the organization of anti-Algerian demonstrations by the Moroccan services, the violent suppression of Sahrawi demonstrators, insinuations that Algeria -- as opposed to Moroccan stonewalling -- was behind current Sahrawi unrest, inflows of

Moroccan drugs, which was corrupting Algerian youth. If this was the posture Morocco chose to adopt, so be it. Algeria did not wish Morocco ill, but it could not engage with Morocco if it persisted in taking such positions.

BELKHEIR: IT'S TOO SOON TO  
RESUME RAPPROCHEMENT EFFORTS  
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15. (C) Ambassador pushed back, repeating that continued tension helped no one and that both sides needed to find a way to rebuild confidence and get things back on track. Belkheir appeared to take the point but said it was too soon to consider such steps. In this regard, he noted that after the cancellation of the Ouyahia visit, Moroccan Deputy Interior Minister al-Himma had called him to say they needed to continue dialogue. Belkheir said he told al-Himma it was hard to talk about dialogue in the context of such publicly insulting behavior toward the Algerian head of government. At the very least, Ambassador rejoined, Algeria should avoid steps and declarations that would further complicate the situation. Belkheir argued unconvincingly that, in any case, both the Polisario letter language and subsequent statements reflected longstanding Algerian positions.

BELKHEIR UNFAVORABLY COMPARES  
CURRENT KING TO HIS FATHER  
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16. (C) As in their previous conversation (Ref B), Ambassador said in the current context the "independence" rhetoric was a departure from the rhetoric of at least the last two years, which had stressed the right of self-determination, not the right to independence. Morocco would never accept independence just as the Sahrawi would never accept integration. That left autonomy as the only area of possible common ground, Ambassador continued. So references to independence were not helpful in guiding expectations toward realistic outcomes. Belkheir countered that the Baker Plan had provided a mechanism to achieve such an outcome by allowing all the inhabitants, Moroccan as well as Sahrawi, to vote in a referendum. Unfavorably comparing Mohammed VI to his father, Belkheir argued the root of the problem was that Morocco lacked confidence and strong leadership. Hassan II had been a tough adversary.

17. (C) In the end, Belkheir claimed, Hassan (with whom he met many times as a secret emissary) understood what had to be done to protect Moroccan interests vis-a-vis the Western Sahara. Accordingly, he had accepted a referendum and, subsequently, the autonomy approach Baker developed. Mohammed VI, by contrast, did not have his father's experience, was timid, and was surrounded by unhelpful advisers. As a result, Morocco has rejected previously accepted positions and lost an opportunity -- via referendum voting procedures that would have allowed all Moroccan residents to participate -- to assure the outcome it needed.

BELKHEIR STRESSES ALGERIA'S PRINCIPLED,  
UNSWERVING SUPPORT FOR SELF-DETERMINATION  
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18. (C) If the United States really wanted to help, it should pressure Morocco to abide by UN Security Council resolutions, just as Algeria had pressured the Polisario to accept the Baker Plan. With some passion, Belkheir emphasized that no one had worked harder than he over the years for improved relations with Morocco and a settlement of the Western Sahara issue. He also stressed the consistency of Algeria's position on self-determination over the years, noting Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos' recent testimony that when Spain withdrew from the Western Sahara, it had transferred administrative responsibilities but not sovereignty to Morocco (and Mauritania). He also cited Algeria's principled support for East Timorese self-determination, despite its very close and sentimental ties with Indonesia stemming from its support for Algeria's liberation struggle.

BELKHEIR DISMISSES ANTI-SETTLEMENT  
ELEMENTS AS UNIMPORTANT IN GUIDING GOA POLICY  
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19. (C) Ambassador said he had no doubts about Belkheir's personal commitment to improve relations and resolve the Western Sahara issue in a manner that would address Moroccan concerns. However, there were pockets of hardline thinking in the FLN as well as Algerian elements who had a vested interest in keeping the border closed and profiting from the illicit border trade. Belkheir acknowledged that such attitudes existed but dismissed them as unimportant, insisting that the FLN, and especially minority elements within the FLN, did not/not make government policy. As for the illicit border trade, the government was acutely aware of the problem and beginning to take strong measures against those involved. (Note: in fact we have begun to see some interesting, relatively high profile anti-corruption prosecutions -- see septel.)

BOUTEFLIKA: HARDENED ALGERIAN RHETORIC A  
RESPONSE TO ATTEMPTED MOROCCAN FAIT ACCOMPLI

10. (C) Later in the day, Belkheir phoned Ambassador to relay President Bouteflika's reaction to our demarche earlier in the day. In the clearest explanation to date as to why the Algerian rhetorical position has hardened, and abandoning all pretense that current rhetoric simply reiterated longstanding positions, Belkheir explained that Bouteflika had become increasingly fed up with Morocco's behavior on the Western Sahara. Morocco had reversed its previous acceptance of a referendum and had rejected the Baker Plan. In so doing, it had rejected international legality. "Tell the Ambassador," Bouteflika instructed Belkheir, "that until Morocco accepted this international legality, Algeria reserved the right to speak about the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination AND independence." Cutting to the chase and echoing comments in a recent interview with a Tunisian daily, in which he referred to Moroccan "chantage" (blackmail), Bouteflika vowed that Algeria would never accept a Moroccan fait accompli on the Western Sahara.

ERDMAN